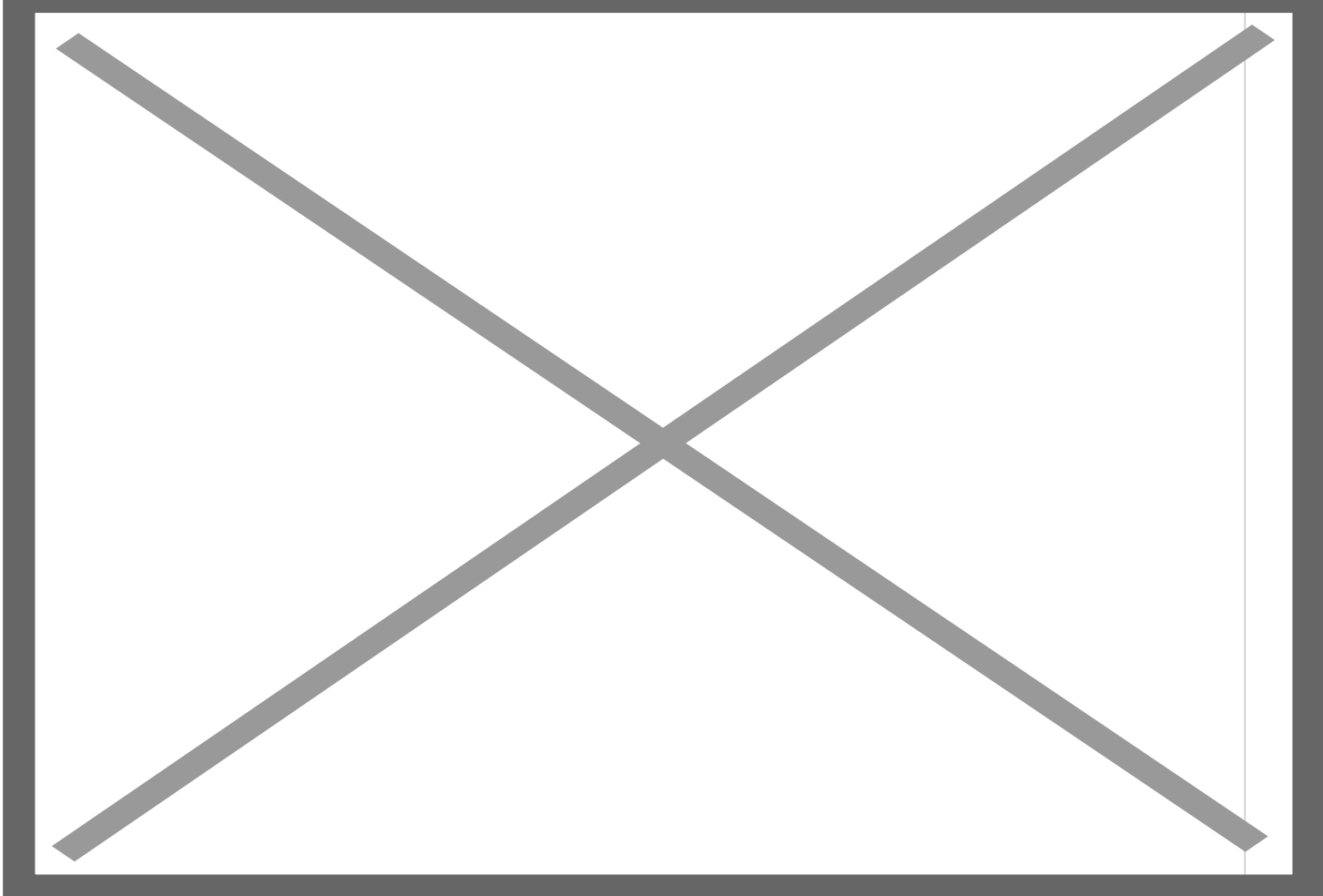


Women soccer players refuse to play until president of Spain's football federation steps down

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Spain players pose for a team group photo before the FIFA Women's World Cup final between Spain and England at Stadium Australia in Sydney **[Jaimi Joy/Reuters]**

Madrid, August 26 (RHC)-- Spain's football federation said it would take legal action to defend its president after calls for him to leave his post reached fever pitch on Saturday.

The move comes after Spain's women's national team announced that they would not play any more games unless the president of the country's football federation steps down for kissing player Jenni Hermoso on the lips after their victory in the final of the Women's World Cup.

Luis Rubiales, who was also criticised for grabbing his crotch after Spain's 1-0 victory over England on Sunday, has resisted growing pressure from athletes, politicians and protesters to resign.

In a statement, the federation said it would show there have been lies about what happened by Hermoso or people speaking for her. The statement on the Royal Spanish Football Federation website said it would take legal action to defend Rubiales' honour, but did not say what the action would consist of.

"Where there is rule of law ... opinions are counteracted with facts and evidence, and lies are rebutted in court." "The RFEF (Royal Spanish Football Federation) and the President will show each of the lies that are spread either by someone on behalf of the player or, if applicable, by the player herself," it said.

The statement was accompanied by four photos of the event last Sunday that it said illustrated Rubiales' contention that Hermoso lifted him by the hips.

On Friday, the Spanish players released a statement, inked by 56 team members, including all 23 from the World Cup winning squad, saying they would not return to the national team "if the present leadership remains in charge."

Hermoso issued a statement on Friday strongly rebuking Rubiales' characterisation of the kiss – which marred the celebrations – as consensual, while the 46-year-old federation president cast himself as the victim at an emergency meeting of the federation in Madrid.

"I won't resign," he declared four times in quick succession, to applause from an overwhelmingly male audience.

Rubiales also told the assembly, that Hermoso "lifted me up" in a celebratory gesture, and he asked her for "a little kiss?" and she "said yes." "The kiss was the same I could give one of my daughters," Rubiales said.

Among those applauding Rubiales were women's national team coach Jorge Vilda and men's national team coach Luis de la Fuente.

Until Friday's assembly, he had received no public support in Spain, with political parties from both the left and the right speaking out against him.

Several Spanish news media outlets reported on Thursday that Rubiales would step down. Instead, he said on Friday that he is the victim of a witch hunt by "false feminists."

The televised broadcast of the medals ceremony did not show the first moments when Rubiales congratulated Hermoso. But it does show that his feet were on the ground before he held her face and kissed her.

Hermoso contradicted Rubiales' version in two statements, one issued through her FUTRPO players' union and another published on social media. She said that she did not consent to the kiss or try to pick up the president and that there was no conversation like the one described by Rubiales.

"I won't tolerate anyone doubting my word and even less someone putting words in my mouth," she said. In a second statement, Hermoso said the kiss "left me in a state of shock." "I believe that no person

in any workplace should be the victim of this type of nonconsensual behaviour,” she added.

Hermoso also accused the federation of pressuring her and her family to speak out in Rubiales’ defence. The federation previously denied a report that it forced her to make a statement downplaying the kiss shortly after it happened.

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